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Personal and Environmental Path Predictors of Girl Child Retention in Lagos State Schools, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is a path tracer analysis of personal and environmental predictors of the girl-child educational enrolment and retention in schools. The tracer analytical survey is based on the on-going debate on how the Nigerian society through its educational provision is making efforts at achieving the 8-point agenda of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for sustainable development. The survey which comprised 200 participants from purposively selected low-income households in Lagos State employed a validated and reliable instrument in the collection of data. Data were analyzed using the chi-square (X^2) and correlation analysis at 0.05 alpha level. Results revealed among others, that poor financial status, school location and cultural practices inhibited the girl-child educational enrolment and retention. Also, the findings revealed that, the monthly income of parents, type of occupation and parents' educational qualification influenced the educational enrolment and retention of the girl-child in Lagos State.

Keywords: *Girl-Child Education; Personal and Environmental Predictors.*

Introduction

In September 2000 during a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in which Head of States and Governments attended in New York, a historic agenda referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was signed. One of the eight-points goals is "the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women". The target of this third goal in the arrangement is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education not later than 2015. Perhaps, this agenda was informed by the former United Nation's Secretary General who observed that:

"no development strategy is better than one that involves women as central players. It has immediate benefits for nutrition, health, savings, and reinvestment of the family, community and ultimately country level. Educating girls is a social development policy that works. It is a long-term investment that yields exceptionally high return" (Annan, 2001).

Before MDGs, the world conference on education for all held in Jomtien in Thailand (1990) and Dakar (2000) endorsed the framework for action to meet the basic learning needs of people especially girls by having access to basic education. The Beijing Platform for Action (1993) include the following: advance the goal of access to basic education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, language, national origin, age, disability, or other forms of discrimination and reduce female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level.

Like other countries that are signatories to United Nations Charter, Nigeria had been responding to the 1985, 1990-2000, and 2001 declarations on girl-child education. This is evident in the provisions of the country's National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) which says "the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels" (P. 8(c)). The policy also states that,

"with a view of correcting the imbalance between different parts of the country with reference to the availability of educational facilities and the number of pupils receiving formal and girls education ..., special efforts shall be made by all appropriate agencies to encourage parents to send their daughters to school" (NPE, 1998; 2004).

It is on the basis of the above that Nigeria developed a national action plan through the launching of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 to make primary education free, compulsory and qualitative. Thus, the Federal Government set itself the following targets and strategies to be achieved by 2015, besides, the MDGs expectations:

- i. 95% of girls of primary school age will be enrolled in primary school or its equivalent;
- ii. 80% of girls up to the age of 15 will be enrolled in a school based on equivalent learning/education programmes;
- iii. 95% of working girls will have access to relevant basic education, with a special focus on hawkers, housekeepers, and groups of hard-to-reach girls;
- iv. 80% of all girls and women aged 15 and above will attain national standards set for literacy, numeracy and problem-solving thinking;
- v. flexible access to relevant educational programmes will be provided to disadvantaged groups such as pregnant girls and young mothers including the use of new information and communication technologies in women education centres; and
- vi. by 2015, there will be drastic reduction of gender disparity in enrollment of programmes (National Planning Commission, 2001).

To achieve the targets, strategies such as monitoring of sensitization programmes on women and girl focused curriculum; initiation of advocacy programmes that mitigate cultural barriers to women's and girls' participation in educational programmes, provision of monitoring instruments and necessary facilities to enhance learning; establishment of flexible programmes on access for girls designed to mainstream young girls into formal basic education; increase women and girls awareness of their rights; increase functional basic education that is gender sensitive and promotion of partnerships were put in place (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001).

The government programmes on girl-child education are so important to development because other developmental efforts depend on it. UNESCO (1995) confirmed that women represent two-thirds of the world's out-of-school population. The majority of more than 130 million children who had not had access to basic education are girls; and that women and girls globally constitute the largest single category of persons denied full and equal opportunities of education for all. To forestall this situation, there is a strong case, now widely recognized, that investing in the education of girls is a critical input for development and has a cluster of interrelating benefits.

In developing countries like Nigeria, parental involvement may have to be initiated and enhanced before girl's access and participation in educational programmes can be achieved. This nexus is the path tracer factor or determinant of girls enrolment rate which helps in changing parental attitudes regarding the value of girls, and in educating females about the benefits of educational programmes for the girl-child. The girl-

child can even be made to help in the financing of boys' education by being a housemaid to people or assisting their parents in income earning activities to pay for boys' education. Even when girls have access to education, the home activities usually circumscribe their academic performance in school. This is because they have little or no time to do their assignments or attend extra lessons because of the work they are expected to do at home.

When there are prejudices against girls' basic education, it is most likely that the incidences of prostitution, early marriage and teenage pregnancy will put an end to the girls' education. FGN/UNICEF (2001) reports that, this is more pronounced in rural areas and in the northern part of Nigeria where over 55% of girls aged 15–19 years are either already mothers or are pregnant.

The deprivation of educational opportunity to girls is likely to exclude them from the mainstream of development in the future, increase the dependency ratio of the population and results in underdevelopment of a nation (Mbanefo, 1994). Investment in children is an essential investment in the future of a society at whatever stage of development (Hewlett, 1991). Evidences suggest that early investment in development of the child can bring improvements in the life of the child and also provides benefit to the entire society (Young, 1995). Surely, the girl-child education serves as an investment that will help facilitate the achievement of family planning objectives and the production of healthier children (Anyanwu, 1995; World Watch Institute, 2002).

Educating the girl-child gives her higher self-esteem, greater decision-making power within the family, more confidence to participate fully in community affairs, and the prospect to one day become an educated mother who can pass on her knowledge to her own daughters and sons (World Watch Institute, 2002). Educating the female child is a key to attaining the successful implementation of population policy. As long as girls and women are thought to be less able than boys and men to navigate human experience and forge their own paths in life, population policy will always be flawed. On the other hand, when girls go to school and women reach economic, social and political parity with men, they have fewer children and give birth later on the average than their mothers did. Good access to health, family planning services, and fertility almost invariably declines to or below replacement level that slows the growth of population (World Watch Institute, 2002; World Bank, 2002; Ajala, 2000).

The lack of investment in girls' education not only affects the limited earning power and opportunity to escape from gender restricting roles, but also contributes to the perpetuation of the cycle of high fertility and gender discrimination (Population Briefs, 1995). Women's average education level is everywhere lower than men's, where food is short it is often girls that get least; and where children have to work, it is often girls that work hardest (Netherlands, 1994). Research has revealed that educating girls presents numerous benefits for girls themselves, the societies, and their present and future families. According to the World Bank (2002), bridging the gap in education would not only help women, their families, and their communities but also the economics of the country they live in. It was reported that "girls' access to education creates a better environment for economic growth and that result is particularly strong for middle income countries. Thus, societies who have preference for not investing in girls pay a price for it in terms of lower economic growth and reduced income.

The fundamental importance of female education for raising children's nutrition is beyond question. Partly because a mother uses her new knowledge and additional income she earns from it to improve diets, care, and sanitation for her children. Female education is probably the strongest instrument that exists for reducing infant mortality and child malnutrition (Haddad, 1999). In fact, World Development Report (1993) noted that,

a 10 percent addition in female literacy reduced child mortality by the same amount in 13 African countries between 1975 and 1985.

According to Wamahiu (1999) significant population of women in Africa are illiterates, never having enrolled into school or had access to literacy education. Others relapse into illiteracy having dropped out of school prematurely, or remain semi literate. Many never have access to any sort of education thereafter.

While some Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and religious organizations are undoubtedly providing continuing education and training for school-girl dropouts, there is a need for a greater coordination and supervision to bring about changes in the perceived values and attitudes towards formal education for the girls. The government must bear greater responsibility towards the out-of-school girl and women by providing them with recognized and approved channels of continued education and training (Wamahiu, 1999).

Unless there is a change in the mind set of the power elite in the region and unless we stop viewing them as recipients of welfare, perpetrators of the population problem, and as a mass of ignorant “housewives” and “mothers” contributing little else to the evolution of our society and culture, we cannot make a breakthrough (Ramachandran, 1999). Some social, environmental and cultural barriers prevent girls and women from entering the educational mainstream and this is something we have not addressed (Wamahiu, 1999). But this can actually be changed by intensive media campaigns targeted at the political elites and opinion leaders.

Statement of the Problem

There is gender disparity between boys and girls in school enrolment in Nigeria in favour of boys. Education of the boy child is usually considered more important than that of girls based on internal and external discontinuity factors which mostly are primordial to African countries. In the urban areas, school aged children especially girls engage in hawking. There exists a cultural bias against the girl-child that makes parents give priority to a boy’s education. It is believed that investing in girls’ education will benefit only the family into which she later marries to at the detriment of parents’ investment. Hence, cultural orientation, locational disparity and individual predisposition to girls’ education are major path reverberating issues of empirical research in the Nigerian society.

This study therefore is a survey prediction of personal and environmental variants of the girl-child educational retention in Lagos State with specific attention on such variables as parental characteristics, socio-economic background, residential locale, and cultural orientation, environmental and social factors.

Research Questions

- i. What are the factors determining girl-child educational enrolment in Lagos State?
- ii. To what extent does economic status of parents affect girl-child’s educational enrolment and retention?
- iii. Is there any relationship between cultural, personal and environmental factors with regards to girl-child education?

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of low-income families in Lagos State. For a representative sample of low income family in Lagos State, Makoko, Okokomaiko and Ajegunle formed the focus clusters because these were regarded as slums in Lagos State. 210 participants were selected from these three areas purposively for the study. The

research instrument for this study is a questionnaire tagged “Girl-Educational Enrolment and Retention Scale (GERS).

To ensure the questionnaire validity, it was subjected to peer review and expert modification from the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan. Test-retest method was employed to ascertain its reliability having administered the instrument on participants from other areas other than the sampled areas which achieved 0.72 reliability level. The instrument was administered by the researcher with assistance from the community leaders in the sample areas. 200 copies of questionnaire were returned and found to be valid for data analysis. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentages.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the data analysis revealed parents’ age, sex, occupation, tribe and type of accommodation. Fifty percent of the respondents were civil servants, 48% were teachers and 2% were farmers. Fifty-four percent of the respondents were Yoruba, 31% were Ibo while 14.5% were Hausa. Forty-eight percent of the respondents lived in one room apartment, 26.5% lived in a room and parlour, 6% of them lived in self-contained room, 11% live in two bedroom flat and 8.5% lived in three bedroom flat. Their mean age was 47 years while 49% were male and 51% female.

Research Question One: What are the factors determining girl-child educational enrolment and retention in Lagos State?

The economic factor was recorded as the highest determinant of girl-child educational enrolment. Most of the respondents (87.5%) noted that lack of money was the reason why parents do not send the girl-child to school. Cultural and biological factors were also measured as accounting for 50%, while many of the respondents (75%) disagreed with the view that the biological classification of girls hinders them from attending schools.

Research Question Two: To what extent does economic status of parents affect girl-child educational enrolment and retention?

The economic status measured in terms of monthly income, type of occupation and educational qualification were significantly related to girl-child education.

Research Question Three: Is there any relationship between cultural factors and girl-child education?

The closer a girl-child is to culture the more her schooling will be affected in terms of retention. Economic factors recorded the highest determinant of girl-child educational enrolment in Lagos Island. The Federal Government and UNICEF (2001) report that poverty is the major factor that excludes the girl-child from being educated. This means that parents who are poor are more likely not to send their female children to school. This finding is true of Nigeria where there is a growing increase in private schools at the neglect of public schools. Although the Federal Government of Nigeria has started implementing Universal Basic Education (UBE) the effects on the enrolment is not yet obvious especially in the promotion of girl-child education.

Parental characteristics significantly affect girl-child education. From the findings the educational qualification of parents and their occupation are two major characteristics of parents that affect girl-child education. This

means that parents who are educated are more likely to send their female children to school than those who are not educated. It was discovered that type of family does not significantly affect girl-child education. Also, there was a positive correlation between cultural factors and girl-child education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has shown the progress being made in Nigeria to increase the access of girls to education as girls bear a major share of the burden of poverty. There are needs for all stakeholders in girl-child education to take steps towards empowering them and enabling them to break through the vicious cycle of poverty.

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) need to make more concerted effort in creating literacy awareness and providing educational support programmes. Some organizations like Child Workers in Nepal concerned centres have committed themselves to the promotion of girls' rights to education. Organizations such as this are needed in Nigeria both in the rural and urban areas.

Government alone cannot solve the problem of girl-child exclusion from school. Private sector should be involved in bridging the gender gap in Nigeria education. It would be necessary to present what government can do to mobilize private sector commitment.

Conclusion

The United Nations through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has set the whole world especially African countries on motion towards sustainable development. It is expected that developing nations would take the cue by formulating policies that can achieve the goals. In Nigeria, the programmes of eliminating poverty was meant to put the country in a better stead in pursuing the Millennium Development Goals. Since poverty eradication is an on-going programme, other sectors that are attached to the programme would need some time before it can be achieved.

Education of the girl-child should not wait for total eradication of poverty because women and girls are the marginalized, the poor, the excluded in the Nigerian society. Since their poverty is not biologically determined, but caused by centuries of social prejudices and denial of opportunities for self-actualization, government and civil societies must look beyond economic poverty. Girls' education as envisioned by EFA, is a step in reversing the current trends by developing and executing national programmes that would educate for the full empowerment of women and girls for their own self-improvement, for their enhanced contribution to the nation's socio-economic well-being, and for ensuring the survival of the next generation.

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